

# The Armour of God

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, as we look at this final section of this letter in our time together this morning, I thought it'd be good to begin by casting our minds right back to the very beginning of the letter and just reminding ourselves how we got to this point, how all this fits together.

So this letter begins in chapter one with this huge picture of God and what he has been doing throughout history. So it speaks about how we were chosen in eternity past before the foundation of the world.

It says that we've been redeemed through Jesus and his sacrifice on the cross and that if we trust in that, if we trust in Jesus, if we are in Christ is Paul's kind of word for that, that we have a place in God's eternal plan for the future when he says that all in heaven and on earth will be united in Christ, will be brought together in him.

And this book begins with this kind of mind-blowing picture of all that God has done, is doing and will do in the future. And from this kind of grand opening, Paul has kind of zoomed in and he said that it's the church.

It's the church made up of all sorts of kind of different people brought together by this plan. It's the church made up of all sorts of people who've been rescued by this rescue plan carried out through Jesus' death and resurrection.

[ 1 : 28 ] It's the everyday church which is God's demonstration of his wisdom, of his victory, that his incredible and eternal plan works.

And then zooming in even closer, we've seen how then this impacts each one of us on what might seem like very mundane, little, day-to-day things.

That actually, Paul has spoken about how we speak to one another, how we serve one another, our view of ethics in different areas of life, our relationships with family, with parents, with children at work, as if these huge truths are kind of funneled down in to see how they affect these little details, these little areas of life.

The title of this series, I don't know if I'd mention this, but it's better late than never, I suppose. Here we are the last week. The title of this series has been An Incredible Gospel for Ordinary Lives.

These incredible truths of the gospel that make a difference in the day-to-day. But as we finish up this morning, it's as if Paul suddenly kind of pans the camera back again, zooms out to show us that big picture, to remind us of the cosmic truths where we began, the cosmic truths which are behind the day-to-day decisions and choices and way of life which God's people are called to strive after.

[ 3 : 00 ] And the picture, this kind of big picture that we're given is a picture of a battle, that we're part of a struggle between good and evil, that there are forces at work that are beyond our comprehension.

Paul leaves us, as we come to the close of this letter, he leaves the Ephesian church, he leaves us, the church in Haddington, the church around the world, in no doubt that living the Christian life, living distinctively, living a life based on and shaped by the gospel is not a walk in the park, but it's a battle.

And yet this book actually finishes on a real high note because it's a battle that we can face with great confidence. We can stand firm if we are in Christ, if our trust is in him, because he has won that battle and we follow in his footsteps.

In him we have all we need. That victory, that eternal plan of God that Paul began the letter by speaking about, he now finishes the letter encouraging us with.

As he shows us really three aspects of this battle that he's talking about. And so the first thing is this, the first thing we see is the enemy in the battle.

[ 4 : 17 ] Who is it that we're fighting against? Who is the enemy in the battle? Well, have a look at verses 10 through to 12. Finally be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

All the way through this letter to the Ephesians, we've seen how Paul has been really clear that that we can see or touch or scientifically test, that is not all there is.

Paul and the whole Bible is really clear about the reality of a spiritual realm. And of course it is. That is what God is. But just as there is God who is good, who is perfect, Paul, the Bible, it is also really clear that there is the devil.

That there are also, as he calls them, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places that are battling against God and his people. That is the enemy in the battle.

[ 5 : 28 ] And I know as I kind of say that, that can sound a bit kind of weird. I'm going to speak in a minute about how this isn't talking about kind of witches and zombies and things like that.

But still, the idea of spiritual forces of evil, that can sound a bit weird. It can sound unusual at best. And really I think probably the reasoning behind that is that we live in a society which is dominated by a worldview called naturalism.

That's not naturism. That's quite different. Thankfully, not as popular. Naturalism, you can look up, it is defined this way. It's the philosophical belief that everything arises from natural properties and causes.

And the supernatural or spiritual explanations are excluded or discounted. That's the definition of naturalism. And we don't have time to speak much about that this morning.

But just to highlight a real difficulty that that belief has, that way of approaching the world has, is it really struggles with the idea of evil. That actually if there's no external standards to define that, if there's no external influences about that, then how can we look at anything and say, well, that is definitely wrong.

[ 6 : 41 ] That is wicked. Contrary to that, Ephesians says, well, why does wicked stuff happen? Why can we look at things or hear stuff on the news and say, no, that is just plain wrong?

You know, why do we do stuff ourselves that actually we know we shouldn't do? Well, it's because there is this very real opposition from the devil. It's because we wrestle against spiritual forces of evil who want precisely the opposite of all that God is carrying out, of this plan that Paul has been unpacking in Ephesians.

John Stott, a great Bible commentator, speaks about these evil, these spiritual forces of evil in this way. He says, is God's plan to create a new society?

Then they will do their utmost to destroy it. Has God, through Jesus Christ, broken down the walls, dividing human beings of different races and cultures from each other? Then the devil will strive to rebuild them.

Does God intend his reconciled and redeemed people to live together in harmony and purity? Then the powers of hell will scatter among them the seeds of discord and sin.

[ 7 : 54 ] That what God is doing, what those looking to follow God are all about, that the devil and the spiritual forces of evil are actively against. And it's really important that we get this, because it would be easy to kind of get to the end of Ephesians and to read through it and think, okay, this all seems simple enough.

I think we get how this book fits together. Here's what God has done in the gospel. Here's how we're to live in response. Simple, let's just go and do it. But actually, we step out the door week by week, and we find it's not that simple.

We find that actually we can't just do it. We can't live the lives that we're supposed to each week we come back having messed up with the very stuff that we were speaking about the week before.

Why is that? Well, Paul finishes by making us know that it's because we're in a battle, and we need to be aware of that. One thing to say just before we move on, I mentioned this before, that this is not about being superstitious.

This is not talking about exorcisms or demon possession. This opposition, this battle against the devil, is talking about the kind of normal day-to-day stuff that Paul's been talking about in his letter.

[ 9 : 07 ] That's how the devil carries out these schemes. And that's something for us to be aware of as a church. What's the most likely thing to put an end to a church like this or to cause kind of massive issues that would hold us back and prevent us effectively sharing the good news of the gospel with people?

It's not that one Sunday morning some kind of ghoulish, demonic figure will kind of stride in from the back. It's that people will speak harshly about one another. It's that people within the church will be unwilling to forgive one another when we make mistakes.

It's that we'll start to ignore or resent people within the church who are different from us. It's that in countless little ways we'll fail to live out some of those distinctives that Paul has called us to.

And the world will say, well, you know, the church is irrelevant. They're no different. That is how the devil operates. That is why it uses this word schemes. Some translations have it as wiles.

It's crafty. And so we need to be really realistic, not weird about this. I think the old kind of adage is true. The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was to convince people he doesn't exist.

[ 10 : 21 ] And that continues to be the case. And yet Paul reveals to us here that we are in this battle. And we need to be aware of that. And if we're not aware of that, then we're doomed to fail.

But Paul highlights that we are number one. And having firstly revealed to us the enemy in the battle, he now shows us, point two, the armor for the battle.

Verse 13, therefore, because you're in the battle against the spiritual forces of evil, because of that, therefore, take up the whole armor of God.

It's important that we think about this battle. This is a battle we cannot win by ourselves. Paul is speaking here about the rulers, the authorities, the cosmic powers. What hope do I have in the face of that?

Well, the hope that we all have is in this armor that God provides. And we see that right from the beginning. Verse 10, we're called to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

[ 11 : 22 ] And that's what these verses are speaking about. This armor is something that God gives, God provides for us. I remember a number of years ago, going hill-walking over on the west coast of Scotland, a few of us, and one guy was a guy who'd just moved over from South Africa.

And we arrived at the top of this mountain in kind of standard Scottish weather. So it was chucking it down, a kind of horizontal rain, incredibly windy, and kind of sleet. And this guy got his jacket out, which looked like it was probably, I don't know, 100 years old or so.

It wasn't really designed, I don't think, for the Scottish conditions, because apparently South African weather is different to Fort William. But he took it out of his bag, and I've never seen anything like it.

This jacket just kind of dissolved in front of his eyes. It was incredible. And there were suddenly bits of kind of thread and feathers and material all over the place. It was as if it looked at the weather and thought, I don't fancy that.

And it was gone. And it was funny. And we kind of laughed at him and his jacket. And so we realized, actually, now we all had to give him stuff to get down the hill so that he wasn't going to freeze.

[ 12 : 27 ] He was like 6'5", which didn't help. My clothes weren't massively helpful. But he ended up coming down the hill kind of shrink-wrapped in our jackets and fleeces and hats.

Someone's stuff here, someone's stuff there. But he was given this stuff so that he could make it the rest of the way. And that's kind of a bit how the armor of God works.

It's something that is given to us so that we can make it the rest of the way. Have a look down at those verses. Look at these items that are listed in the armor. It's truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation.

As we've worked through the book of Ephesians, these are not things that we possess in and of ourselves. These are things that are given to us by God. This is God's armor lent to us.

And actually, we can see that even more clearly. Paul here, enlisting this armor, he's referring back to the Old Testament, to that part of the Bible written before Jesus was born, and to a prophet called Isaiah.

[ 13 : 30 ] And Isaiah says, hundreds of years before Jesus, that God is going to come as a warrior to win the victory and bring justice. And he's described as putting on righteousness as a breastplate and a helmet of salvation on his head.

He's described as having faithfulness, the sash around his waist. And that is Isaiah looking forward to this time when God will come with this spiritual armor to win this battle.

And like the whole of the Old Testament, that is looking forward to Jesus. That's who he's speaking about. He's wearing this helmet of salvation, this breastplate of righteousness, this faithfulness, this truth around his waist.

It's Jesus who's the one who came and preached that gospel of peace. It is Jesus that had that perfect faith in his Father God, even to the point where he laid down his life.

It is Jesus who used the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, to fight off the devil's temptations when he was in the wilderness, so that he could be the perfect person that we fail to be.

[ 14 : 37 ] There's a real danger that we get to the end of Ephesians. We get to this passage that might be familiar to so many of us. And right at the end, suddenly we skip Jesus out. And we suddenly go back to thinking, okay, here's all the stuff that I've got to do to resist the devil.

If I'm just truthful, if I'm righteous, if I spread good news, the point isn't that we don't strive after those things. But the point is that we're able to strive after that.

We're able to put on that armor because Jesus, first of all, has been there, that he has done that, that he wore that armor and was victorious. It's his armor, it's his strength, it's his might.

And because he has won that victory, because he has fulfilled that plan that the whole of the book of Ephesians is about, we're now able to wear that armor as we walk forward in the good works that he's prepared in advance for us to do, as Ephesians says.

And that's the whole pattern of the book of Ephesians. We've mentioned this a few times. Chapters 1 to 3, here's what Jesus has done. Chapters 4 to 6, now here's how we live it out. And the armor of God follows that same pattern.

[ 15 : 51 ] It is because Jesus stood firm and spoke only the truth. Because of the perfection of his speech, his speech about God, his speech about other people. Well, now we can speak the truth.

Because our security, our identity is in him, we don't need to pretend anymore. We don't need to lie to influence what other people think about us or to get what we think we need.

We have all we need in Christ. We are secure in him. We're able to win that battle of what we say. It's because Jesus had that perfect faith, trusting his Father God in every circumstance.

And that we see through his resurrection that that faith was repaid, that that faith was in the right place, that we know that God can be trusted. That we're able to have that same faith, which it says here, extinguishes the flaming darts of the evil one, that protects us from those lies about God and ourselves, that the devil kind of fires in, that you're not worth it, God doesn't love you.

We look at Jesus, his perfect faith, perfect obedience, his death and resurrection, and that extinguishes those lies. It is because Jesus was perfectly righteous and yet died in our place.

[ 17 : 06 ] Well, we're given that righteousness. We are justified, declared righteous before God. We're brought back into a relationship with him so that in light of what Jesus has done, now we can strive to live righteous lives.

We can live these lives that Paul has been writing about, that the devil so desperately wants to drag us away from, that we're able to live in the security of relationship with God, because that is the foundation, not the destination.

And we could go through each one of these parts of the armor and speak about how, because Jesus has perfectly worn this armor and triumphed, that now we can stand firm in that armor, that we can live this life that resists the devil in the daily, day-by-day attacks he makes on us, attacks which generally are not sort of terrifying or dramatic, but which are constant, and which would subtly and gradually drag us away from loving God, drag us away from loving one another.

These attacks that we need to be prepared for, armed against, standing firm, not in our strength, but in his. And again, just before we move on, a quick point, that does not mean that we're sort of powerless bystanders who have no influence or responsibility.

You know, Paul's deliberate, isn't he, that we're called to put this armor on, and we're called to live these things out. We're called to have that sword of the spirit, which is the word of God, the Bible at our fingertips by spending time in it ourselves.

[ 18 : 42 ] But ultimately, all of this, it is grounded, it is founded on keeping Christ as our foundation, in having the gospel as our security and hope, in each day, proactively remembering Jesus' victory on our behalf.

That is how we put this armor on, so that we can continue to follow him. It says we remember Jesus' victory and stand in his strength, that we put on this armor for the battle and can resist the devil and all that he throws at us.

So there's the enemy in the battle, the armor for the battle. Finally, Paul reminds us of the importance of the prayer throughout the battle. Verse 18, praying at all times in the spirit, with all prayer and supplication.

To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints. Peter here doesn't, Paul, sorry, doesn't count prayer as one element of the armor, but rather is the thing that kind of surrounds everything else.

It's as if prayer is to be kind of the air that Christians breathe. And again, it's this reminder that we're in a spiritual battle and when we pray, we're calling on God to help us with his spiritual resources.

[ 19 : 58 ] It's so easy to kind of stand here and say that if you're anything like me, you find prayer hard. It's really easy to talk about it, but it's difficult to kind of sit down and do it. Why is that?

I think partly it's because we have busy lives. Partly it's because we don't kind of schedule time to pray. We think maybe it'll just happen, but it doesn't. But above all of that, even if we get those things right, it's because we're in a battle.

It's because our enemy doesn't want us to pray. It's because that's how we connect with God who has the strength that we need for this battle. You'll have to excuse my football illustrations, which I try and keep to a minimum, but occasionally they sneak out.

But this year in the European Cup, in the Champions League, Ajax from Amsterdam had a brilliant run through the tournament playing some brilliant football. But one thing that happened every round, their home leg, their fans, the ultras, they were called, would find wherever the opposition team, whichever hotel they were staying in, and they would basically camp outside that hotel and just have a massive party all night the night before the game.

They would set off fireworks at 3 a.m. in the morning, anything they could do because they didn't want their opponents to get this rest, this recharge. They wanted to disrupt them and stop that as much as they could.

[ 21 : 19 ] And that's kind of how the devil operates with our prayers. He wants to disrupt that opportunity that we have to strengthen ourselves in the Lord. But part of our battle is to pray and to recognize that even in doing that, it is a battle.

And so this prayer is so important, so vital, and also it's so all-encompassing. You see there in verse 18 there are four alls that Paul writes there to describe this prayer.

He says it's at all times, that prayer is kind of the constant frame of mind for God's people communicating with him, that just as the devil doesn't try and stop dragging us away from God, that we're not to stop trying to connect with God.

It's with all prayer and supplication and the idea behind that is all different types of prayer. Prayers asking, prayers giving thanks, prayers which are long, prayers which are short, prayers which are planned, prayers which we just kind of fire out in a crisis, that whatever the situation, we would react with prayer of various different sorts.

Paul says it's with all perseverance that in our prayers we do not give up, that just because things don't happen immediately, we don't stop, that we keep on coming back to God, that hard times don't prevent us from praying, but actually encourage us to keep on going all the more.

[ 22 : 39 ] And fourthly, it's for all the saints that we would pray for Christians all over the place, not just for ourselves, not just for our church, not even just for our country, but for God's people all over the world.

It's all-encompassing prayer. And what is it then that it's for? Let's finish with this. What is the role of prayer in this battle? Well, that's what we see in verse 19 and 20.

Really, what Paul wanted prayer for is what he wants us to pray for for all Christians, or he wants us to pray for one another, for ourselves, for Christians we've never met on the other side of the world.

And what is that? Well, Paul asks for prayer that he would be bold in proclaiming the gospel, that he would have the opportunities and be given the words to say.

I don't know if you get kind of to the end of the book, Ephesians, and that just blows your mind a bit, that Paul, the apostle Paul, Paul who wrote big chunks of the Bible, Paul who's in prison for teaching the Bible, Paul who's kind of been there and done that in terms of the early church and Christianity, that Paul would ask for prayer for boldness.

[ 23 : 49 ] I sort of think of Paul as like the Arnold Schwarzenegger of Christianity. He's incredible. and yet he recognizes his need for prayer that he'd be bold. He recognizes that he's in a battle with an enemy far bigger than he is.

But he knows that through prayer and through the armor that God provides that he is able to make progress, that he can share the gospel and that God will use that.

God will use that to advance his purposes, to win that battle. And that is our prayer as well. That is how God's kingdom progresses in the battle.

Incredibly, that he uses ordinary people like us, ordinary churches like this, people who are praying at all times, in all ways, with all perseverance for all the saints that we would have the boldness to proclaim the gospel.

That God might give us the words to say to advance his kingdom. that this incredible message right at the heart of Ephesians, all about what God has done through Jesus, this plan from eternity past through the cross to eternity future, and the incredible kind of transformed lives that that leads to, might not just be seen in us in our day-to-day actions, living together in unity as God's people, but also might be heard in our day-to-day speech as we prayerfully tell others about all that God has done, that we speak boldly with words that God gives us to say.

[ 25 : 26 ] And our prayer is that we would do that not in our strength, but in the strength of the Lord, that we would do it in his mind, daily putting on the armor that he provides by reminding ourselves of the truth of the gospel so that we can stand firm in this day-to-day battle, that we might represent God well, and live for him, and share the good news of Jesus with those around us.

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